

County of Los Angeles DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

425 Shatto Place, Los Angeles, California 90020 (213) 351-5602

August 11, 2004

To:

Supervisor Don Knabe, Chairman

Supervisor Gloria Molina, Chair Pro Tem

Supervisor Yvonne B. Burke Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky

Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich

From:

David Sanders

Director

YVONNE B. BURKE
Second District
ZEV YAROSLAVSKY
Third District
DON KNABE
Fourth District
MICHAEL D. ANTONOVICH
Fifth District

Board of Supervisors GLORIA MOLINA First District

DCFS SEMI-ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT

In accordance with the County's Strategic Plan Goal No. 5: To improve the overall well-being of children and families, for the past year, the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) has focused upon improving outcomes for the children and families it serves. The Department's goals are:

- (1) SAFETY: Improved safety for children in our care;
- (2) **PERMANENCY:** Improved timelines to permanency; and
- (3) **DETENTIONS**: Reduced reliance on detention.

The following is a summary of our progress to date:

- (1) **SAFETY**: The abuse and/or neglect rate for children in foster care has declined by over 40% over the past seven months.
- (2) **PERMANENCY**: The median length-of-stay for children in out-of-home placement has declined by 8% over the past year.
- (3) **DETENTIONS**: The number of children in-care has declined by approximately 10% and new entries in-care declined approximately 14% from the period January to June 2003 as compared to the period January to June 2004.

This report details the Department's outcomes targeted for improvement throughout this past year and the measures that support them. It further details the broad, specific and infrastructure strategies employed as well as the additional areas upon which the Department continues to focus toward improved outcomes for children and families.

We plan to issue this report, which highlights our strategies, progress and challenges to your Board on a semi-annual basis. It is not exhaustive but provides a sample of the Department's efforts to date.

INTRODUCTION

The changes we are undertaking to improve the Department's performance require efforts on multiple fronts. However, the following two principles consistenty drive our current and future strategies:

- (1) Our Department's improvement must be monitored and demonstrated through the consistent and ongoing measurement of improved outcomes in safety, permanence and reduced detentions.
- (2) Programs or initiatives, existing or new, are only effective to the extent that they improve the quality and quantity of time social workers spend with families. Changes must focus on improving the interaction between social workers and families.

To this end, I identified three outcomes and targeted improvements across seven measures supporting those three outcomes. The outcomes and the measures that support them follow:

OUTCOME #1: SAFETY - Improved safety for children in our care

- ➤ **MEASURE #1**: Reduction in the number of active DCFS cases with two or more allegations within the last 12 months, inconclusive or substantiated.
- > **MEASURE #2**: Reduction in the rate of child abuse and/or neglect in foster care.
- ➤ **MEASURE #3**: Comparison of the rate of child abuse and/or neglect in foster care for baseline (2002-2003) vs. the current year (2003-2004).
- ➤ **MEASURE #4**: Comparison of the rate of child abuse and/or neglect in state-licensed foster family homes and foster family agency-certified homes for baseline (2002-2003) vs. the current year (2003-2004).

OUTCOME #2: PERMANENCY - Improved timelines to permanency

- > **MEASURE #5:** Reduction of the median length-of-stay in care of children in out-of-home placement.
- MEASURE #6: Reduction of the average length-of-stay in care of children in outof-home placement.

OUTCOME #3: DETENTIONS - Reduced reliance on detention

MEASURE #7: Reduction in the rate of child detentions following reports of suspected child abuse and/or neglect.

Attached please find a detailed report of the Department's progress across the seven measures, through which we have monitored departmental outcomes improvement. Although it is clear that we need to continue to make significant improvement in multiple areas, the identified measures have allowed us to assess performance at the regional

office, supervisor and social worker levels; and have created a structure to assure accountability. Furthermore, we are able, through identification of strengths and problems, to quickly allocate resources or implement new strategies at the regional office level.

Additionally, there are numerous broad, specific and infrastructure strategies that the Department has implemented throughout this past year to achieve the desired outcomes.

BROAD STRATEGIES TO ACHIEVE DESIRED OUTCOMES

Alignment of revenues and expenditures with the identified outcomes

PERFORMANCE-BASED EXPENDITURES: Historically, the Department has not tied performance to expenditure of its resources. However, the establishment of departmental outcomes has created the foundation for us to do so. As a result, we are in a position now to create performance-based contracts. We developed a group home contract that is outcome-based and links our continued use of an agency to its ability to achieve certain performance targets. Further, we are in the process of establishing a similar contract for providers of Family Preservation and Family Support services.

FEDERAL TITLE IV-E WAIVER: Revenue is currently focused on specific funding streams and is linked, in large part, to the removal of children from their homes. This revenue is tied to paying for board and care costs as well as case management services for federally eligible children who have been removed from their parents and placed in out-of-home care settings. Our primary strategy to address these limitations has been to apply for a Federal Title IV-E Waiver to provide the County with the flexibility to spend Federal IV-E funds on foster children and child welfare services that otherwise would not be eligible for federal financial participation. Through this flexibility, the County proposes to develop, implement and expand a wide array of programs and services that are strength-based, family-centered, child-focused and community-based. The State has submitted the waiver application to the Federal government and it currently remains under federal review.

Redeployment of non-case-carrying staff to case-carrying positions

REDUCING CASELOADS: The quality and quantity of time spent with children and families correlates highly with improved safety for children and improved timelines to permanency. Therefore, we have focused on reducing caseloads to allow social workers to spend more time with families by redeploying non-case-carrying staff to case-carrying positions. During our first phase of redeployment, we moved approximately 250 filled or vacant Children's Social Worker (CSW), Supervising Children's Social Worker (SCSW) or other administrative positions from non-case carrying to case-carrying status. We are currently in the second phase of the redeployment process, which focuses on redeploying clerical support staff to increase the necessary support to case-carrying CSWs; and continue to evaluate vacant

positions for possible redeployment. Finally, we will begin our third phase with a focus on additional redeployment of administrative staff to case-carrying positions.

Improvement in our working relationship with others

Achievement of improved outcomes requires support from and accountability of other systems. We have made significant progress in this area, as follows:

- LAW ENFORCEMENT: Linking our child protection investigations to those of law enforcement is critical to improving the quality of the initial information necessary to assure safety for children. The Department has consolidated an excellent collaborative relationship with law enforcement. More than 25 law enforcement agencies countywide have expressed their commitment and interest to the success of this collaboration.
 - (1) We have implemented the Multi-Agency Response Team (MART), which results in our staff's direct involvement in law enforcement raids where gang involvement and the presence of children are suspected. This partnership has improved safety for children in these circumstances.
 - (2) We are in the process of co-locating investigative staff with law enforcement to enhance the sharing of critical information and to provide consultation regarding child abuse and neglect.
 - (3) We are in the process of finalizing implementation of protocols and procedures developed for an expedited response to all reports of suspected child abuse and/or neglect received from law enforcement jurisdictions.
- THE COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES: On February 3, 2004, the Board approved Board agenda item #19 the Children's Planning Council's three County goals and nine corresponding recommendations. Recommendation #s 4, 5 and 6 focused on increasing the number of children in safe, stable, nurturing homes. Following Board approval of the recommendations, the Department began colleading three workgroups with the Commission for Children and Families on Prevention, Reunification and Permanency for Older Youth. This workgroup structure will allow the implementation of necessary changes across systems.
- SPA REALIGNMENT: The Department has realigned its regional offices with Service Planning Areas (SPAs). Effective April 1, 2004, the Department began assigning all new cases in accordance with SPA boundaries, which has facilitated our work with SPA Councils and is consistent with the geographic alignment of other County Departments.

SPECIFIC STRATEGIES TO ACHIEVE DESIRED OUTCOMES

There are multiple specific strategies we have implemented to address each of the three outcomes. Needless to say, the analysis of our performance on the seven

measures will guide our development, implementation and continued use of specific strategies. I'll briefly summarize the strategies and remain available to provide greater detail, as necessary.

Safety

The Department's goal is to improve safety for the children in our care. The main issues of concern with departmental performance related to safety are identified as the need to reduce the rates of child fatalities as well as abuse and/or neglect in foster care. To target improvements in these areas, the following strategies have or are in the process of being implemented:

- INDEPENDENT REVIEWS: Historically, the Department has relied upon the
 information or observation of children and families that CSWs document in their
 case files and/or report to their SCSWs. Independent assessment of families will
 improve accountability and the quality of the information that the Department
 provides to Dependency Court. As such, to ensure closer oversight and
 accountability, we are finalizing negotiations with labor on:
 - (1) Requiring SCSWs to personally visit a certain percentage of families serviced by the CSWs under their supervision. We expect full implementation to occur within 90 days.
 - (2) Requiring an emergency response CSW, rather than the case-carrying CSW, to conduct an independent investigation of allegations of abuse/neglect of children already under DCFS supervision.
- STRUCTURED DECISION-MAKING: Structured Decision-Making (SDM) is an actuarial-based tool designed to assess safety and risk of re-abuse. Research on SDM has shown that, when properly used, the tool leads to a reduced risk of subsequent re-abuse, referrals and case opening for children who have been abused or neglected. In addition, it allows the Department to provide Dependency Court with information in a comprehensive and consistent manner. We have fully trained all staff and currently implemented the use of SDM.
- CRITICAL INCIDENT AND CHILD DEATH REVIEW: We have implemented a child death review protocol and improved our critical incident review process. These reviews of child deaths and injuries resulted in the identification of necessary policy and/or practice improvement areas that require the allocation of new or additional resources.
- MEDICAL/MENTAL HEALTH HUBS: Historically, poor medical assessments have contributed to decisions that resulted in children remaining in unsafe situations where they were re-abused. We have identified five sites that will serve as medical/mental health hubs for all children served by DCFS. Each hub will provide forensic medical and mental health assessments 24 hours per day, 7 days per week. Currently County USC Medical Center has the necessary infrastructure and support to become the first hub. The other sites currently being considered for this

purpose are Antelope Valley High Desert Hospital, Martin Luther King Medical Center, Harbor View UCLA Medical Center and OliveView Medical Center. We anticipate the ability to initially fund the staffing of these sites by the use of funds currently in the Provisional Financing Uses Fund for the Net County Dollars that were devoted to MacLaren Children's Center. A proposed Board letter to support such use of the County USC Medical Center is anticipated within two months.

Permanency

The Department's goal is to provide adequate services to children and families to enable children to safely remain in their homes and/or to achieve timely permanency. The main issue of concern with departmental performance related to permanency is in shortening the timelines to family reunification or, alternatively, to adoption or transfer of legal guardianship. To target improvements in these areas, the following strategies have or are in the process of being implemented:

 "POINT OF ENGAGEMENT" - The "Point of Engagement" model has been implemented in two regional offices and preliminary evidence from the DCFS Wateridge regional office suggests a shortening of timelines to permanency. We are currently training staff in four additional offices on its implementation.

In the "Point of Engagement" model:

- (1) The case-carrying CSW begins working with the Emergency Response CSW prior to the detention of a child. Historically, the case-carrying CSW does not work with a family until the emergency response CSW completes the investigation of the allegations, which may take between 30 to 40 days.
- (2) "Alternative Response," built into the design of this model, assures that children are connected to services within the community in the event that inconclusive findings render them without departmental services despite an environment in which abuse or neglect may occur. As such, development of community resources in each office is a critical component of this model.
- (3) A decision by a team of departmental and other agency staff is required prior to detention of a child or prior to an initial court hearing.
- "THE HOME STUDY PROJECT" The completion of home studies was the single greatest factor contributing to the length the time between termination of parental rights and finalized adoptions. Between July and October 2003 (four months), through an expedited home study process, the Department completed over 1,600 adoption home studies for families waiting to adopt children. This was a marked improvement from the previous 14-month average to complete an adoption home study.
- "THE TORRANCE MODEL" This strategy, previously piloted as "the Torrance Model," places an adoption social worker in each social work unit to begin working with children prior to the termination of parental rights. Although most previously co-

located adoption staff have already been relocated throughout the majority of our regional offices, the remaining offices where adoptions staff have not yet relocated have space limitations, which we anticipate addressing within the next six months.

- "CONSOLIDATED HOME STUDIES" Historically, the Department completed home studies for foster families and for adoptive families separately and independently. This significantly lengthened the time from placement to finalized adoption. Furthermore, the approval standards for an adoptive home study were higher than that for foster care. As such, in some situations, a family approved for foster care did not subsequently meet the higher standards for adoption, rendering them unable to adopt the children who resided in their homes for many years. We have now consolidated all home studies at the higher standard. All new foster and adoptive families are approved in accordance with adoptive family standards and, as such, foster families will not be required to repeat a home study when adoption is sought.
- "OLDER YOUTH PERMANENCY" There is now a national awareness of foster care system failures across the country. It is clearly understood that too many youth are languishing in expensive out-of-home care and exiting dependency with poor outcomes. Through a specialized process, we are implementing reviews of children who have been in care for an extended period of time without a permanent resolution. The goal of these reviews is to identify ties to one or more nurturing adults. The Department will then assist the youth and the identified adult(s) to work to reach an agreement of how their relationship will be defined: through adoption, guardianship or a mentoring relationship. We anticipate the ability to fund this mediation process by the use of funds currently in the Provisional Financing Uses Fund for the Net County Dollars that were devoted to MacLaren Children's Center. A proposed Board letter to support such use of the funds is anticipated within two months.
- "CONCURRENT PLANNING" By redesigning the work of adoption staff, we have reduced our timelines to permanency for children who cannot be safely reunified with their families. The Department is currently finalizing negotiation with labor regarding a new structure that will support full implementation of concurrent planning. This structure will focus on simultaneous versus sequential delivery of services thus changing the role of the Dependency Investigator, the case-carrying CSW and the adoption CSW. We expect this change will support a significant reduction in the timeline from initial placement to reunification, transfer of guardianship or termination of parental rights.
- RELATIONSHIP WITH COUNTY COUNSEL: The Department is currently requiring consultation with County Counsel at different points during the life of a case to better improve decision-making as well as the quality of information that the Department provides to Dependency Court. We have developed a plan with County Counsel to increase our efforts during the next six months with a specific focus on reduced timelines to permanency.

Detention

The Department's goal is to ensure that only those children and families who would appropriately be served by the child welfare system enter the system. However, although reduced reliance on detention is one of our desired outcomes, it is critical to assure that our recidivism rate does not increase as a result. To target improvements in these areas, the following strategy is in the process of being implemented:

TEAM DECISION-MAKING: The "Point of Engagement," and "Alternative Response" models described above are designed to reduce departmental reliance on detention as one means of ensuring the safety of children. However, to safeguard against recidivism, we are in the process of implementing Team Decision-Making, prior to initial detention, in most of our offices. The intent of Team Decision-Making is to assure that the decision whether to detain is based upon adequate information from family and other professionals; and to improve service planning and access. Implementation of Team Decision-Making will be completed in all offices within the next six months.

INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGIES TO ACHIEVE DESIRED OUTCOMES

To improve overall Department functioning and/or to achieve the desired outcomes for children and families, there are several infrastructure strategies that we have implemented to improve support to and accountability for direct service staff or providers.

- BUDGET: The Department has made significant improvements in its two budgetary units, administrative and assistance, combined. We were able to account for the historical increase in the assistance budget, related to the costs of foster care, and to assure that our revenues for FY2003-2004 were sufficient to meet our needs. Furthermore, the efficiencies of the above strategies, i.e., structured decision-making, expedited adoption home studies and concurrent planning, are projected to reduce foster care costs for FY 2004-2005. As such, we are better positioned to assure improved fiscal discipline and accountability as we move into the future.
- PROPER ITEM CONTROL: For quite some time, the basic Departmental controls to budget and to manage personnel were unreliable. Payroll items had been moved and staff had been inappropriately given work assignments across all areas of the Department. Following the implementation of numerous improvements to assure proper item control, at this time, all administrative and management items have been reviewed and appropriately assigned. Direct service items are in the process of being reviewed and assigned.
- PERFORMANCE REVIEWS: For quite some time, the Department was completing slightly under 60% of performance reviews in a timely manner, if at all. Although the challenges connected with unreliable item controls slowed our improvement in this

area, we recently completed a project that identifies performance reviews by the responsible Deputy Director, manager and supervisor, which will assist us in more closely monitoring our progress. To date, we have demonstrated consistent improvement and are currently exceeding a 90% completion rate of performance evaluations in a timely manner.

- CONTRACT MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE: Revisions to our contract management structure specifically include a de-emphasis on reactive investigations and reviews, in favor of an improvement in proactive management and monitoring. The establishment of performance measures and outcomes in our contracts is a first step toward this end. This will also require the Department to change its service authorization process to assure that children are referred only to those providers that demonstrate fiscal accountability and are producing positive outcomes. We will increase our focus on proactively visiting providers and working directly with them toward improved outcomes.
- PEER REVIEW PROCESS: In this process, staff from one office extensively reviews the casework of staff from another office. The reviews include interviews with CSWs, families and professionals, as well as record reviews. The results of the peer review process assist in planning for improved outcomes.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

While the Department has and will continue to make improvements, there are at least three additional areas that are targeted for improvement. As part of the next semi-annual report, which will be issued on January 31, 2005, I hope to report on improvements in the following areas as well:

- (1) The length of time from initial placement to termination of parental rights, reunification or transfer of guardianship. Although significant improvements were made in reducing the median days in care, the total time is still excessive. We continue to focus on structural changes in the Department to better support concurrent planning.
- (2) The comparisons of decision-making and outcomes achievement yield inconsistent results from regional office to regional office as well as from CSW to CSW. We continue to focus on improved implementation of Structured Decision-Making and Team Decision-Making to help to reduce the inconsistencies and to improve outcomes.
- (3) Social work documentation is inconsistent and, in some areas, inadequate. Documentation of time spent with families is as critical in many ways as the time itself and remains central to our efforts. We continue to focus on supervisory and management role responsibility and accountability toward outcomes improvement.

For any questions or comments, please feel free to contact me directly at (213) 351-5600; or your staff may contact Helen Berberian, Board Liaison, at (213) 351-5530.

DS:mdd

Attachments

c: Board Executive Officer Chief Administrative Officer County Counsel

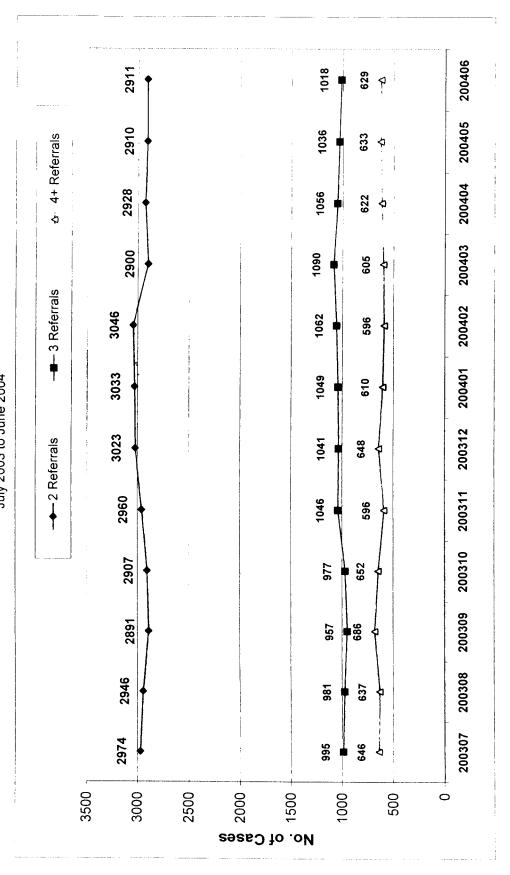
1. Active Cases with 2 or more Referrals within the last 12 months

Definition:

This chart provides the 12 month comparison of active DCFS cases who received new referrals (2, 3 and 4+) with inconclusive and substantiated allegations within the last 12 months from the report month.

Director's Goal #3: Reduce the rate of abuse in foster care by 20%.

Department of Children and Family Services Active Cases with 2, 3 and 4+ Referrals for the Last 12 Months July 2003 to June 2004



Report Month	200307	200308	200309	200310	200311	200312	200401	200402	200403	200404	200405	200406
2 Referrals	2974	2946	2891	2907	2960	3023	3033	3046	2900	2928	2910	2911
3 Referrals	962	981	957	977	1046	1041	1049	1062	1090	1056	1036	1018
4+ Referrals	646	637	989	652	596	648	610	596	605	622	633	629

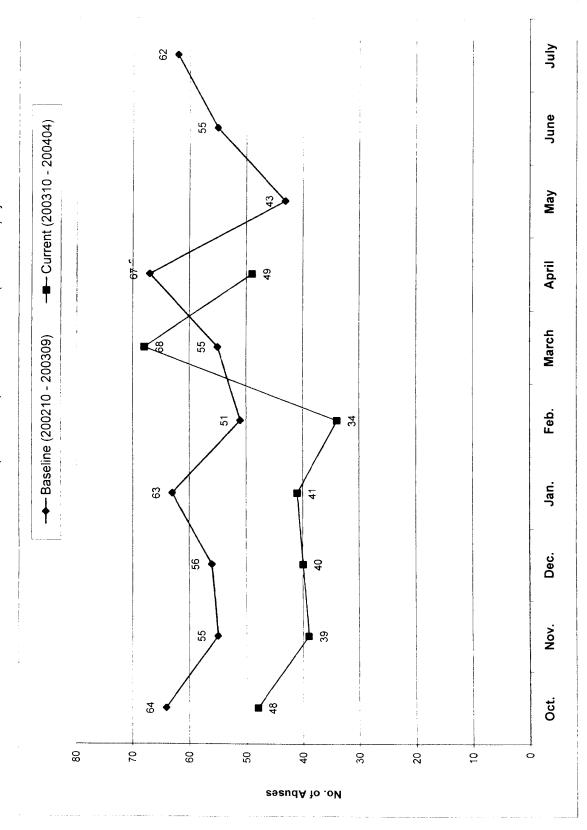
2. Comparison of Child Abuse and/or Neglect in Foster Care

Definition:

Homes. Group Homes do not have the substitute care provider identified in comparison between the Federal Year (2002-2003) and (2003-2004). The report includes foster care abuse in all Facility Types except Group Using the LA County Methodology, this report provides the monthly CWS/CMS. LA County Methodology: substantiated allegation of abuse/neglect where the perpetartor name matches the substitute care provider name whose placement home is a prior or the current placement of the child.

Director's Goal #3: Reduce the rate of abuse in foster care by 20%

Department of Children and Family Services Comparison of Child Abuse and/or Neglect in Foster Care Baseline (2002-2003) vs. Current Year (2003-2004) by Month



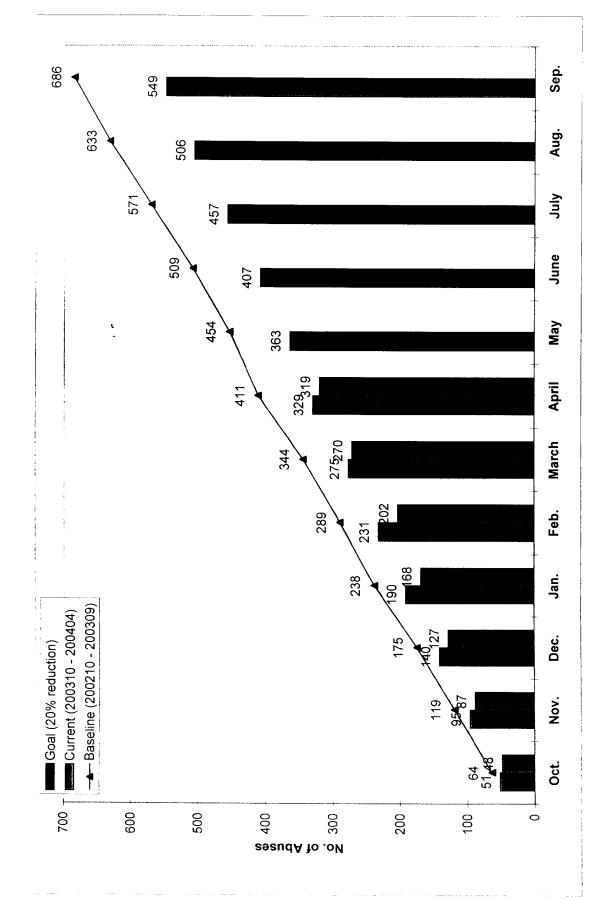
3. Comparison of Child Abuse and/or Neglect in Foster Care Current Year (2003-2004) with Year-to-Date Abuse Counts for Baseline (2002-2003) vs. Goal (20% Reduction) and

Definition:

Using the LA County Methodology, this chart provides the comparison of the Goal (20% reduction on abuse) with the monthly cumulative abuse counts for the current Federal Year (2003-2004).

Director's Goal #3: Reduce the rate of abuse in foster care by 20%

Department of Children and Family Services Comparison of Child Abuse and/or Neglect in Foster Care Baseline (2002-2003) vs. Goal (20% Reduction) and Current Year (2003-2004) (Year to Date Abuse Counts)



4. Comparison of Child Abuse and/or Neglect in FFA/FFH Homes for Baseline (2002-2003) vs. Current Year (2003-2004) with Year to Date Abuse Counts

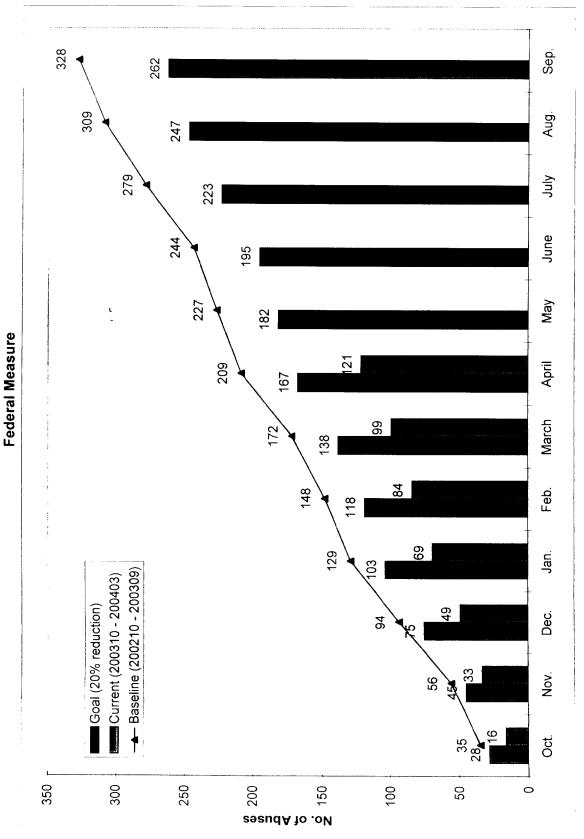
Definition:

report is aligned with the Federal Measure that includes the abuse/neglect comparison of Foster Care Abuse in Foster Homes and FFA Certified Homes between the Federal Year (2002-2003) and (2003-2004). This Using the LA County Methodology, this report provides the monthly in Foster Homes and FFA Certified Homes only.

(UC Berkeley produces the report for the Federal Measure.)

Director's Goal #3: Reduce the rate of abuse in foster care by 20%

Department of Children and Family Services
Comparison of Child Abuse and/or Neglect in FFA/FFH Homes
Baseline (2002-2003) vs. Goal(20% Reduction) and Current Year (2003-2004)
(Year to Date Abuse Counts)



Abuse in Foster Care (FFA and FFH Homes)

Permanency

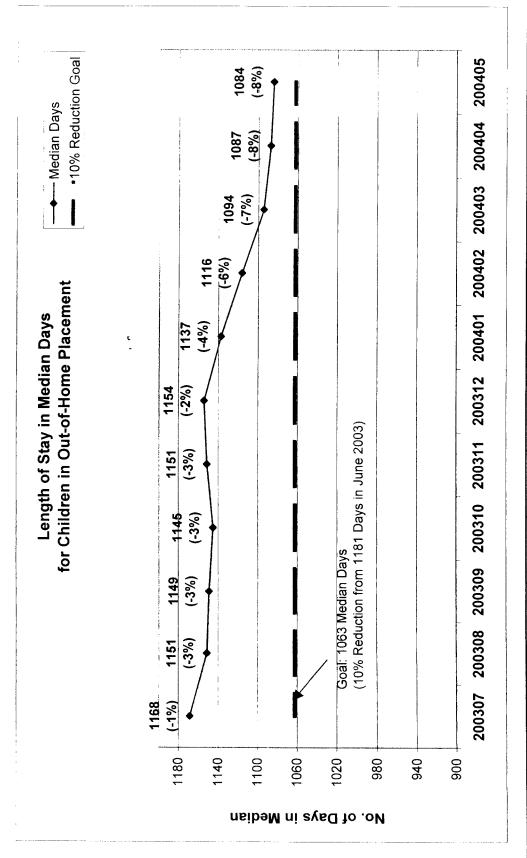
5. Length of Stay in Median Days

Definition:

May 2004. It also shows the monthly % change comparing each month's This chart provides the length of stay in median days from July 2003 to performance to reach the goal of 1063 median days (10% reduction from the 1181 median days in June 2003).

Director's Goal #2: Reduce the median length of stay in placement by

Department of Children and Family Services Length of Stay in Median Days for Children in Out-of-Home Placement



Year & Month	200307	200308	200309	200310	200311	200312	200401	200402	200403	200404	200405
No. of Children	27979	27821	27462	27233	26994	26890	26764	26647	26500	26297	26175
Median Days	1168	1151	1149	1145	1151	1154	1137	1116	1094	1087	1084
% Change from July 2003	-1%	-3%	-3%	-3%	-3%	-2%	~4~	%9-	%2-	%8-	-8%

Median Days for Children in Out-of-Home Placement

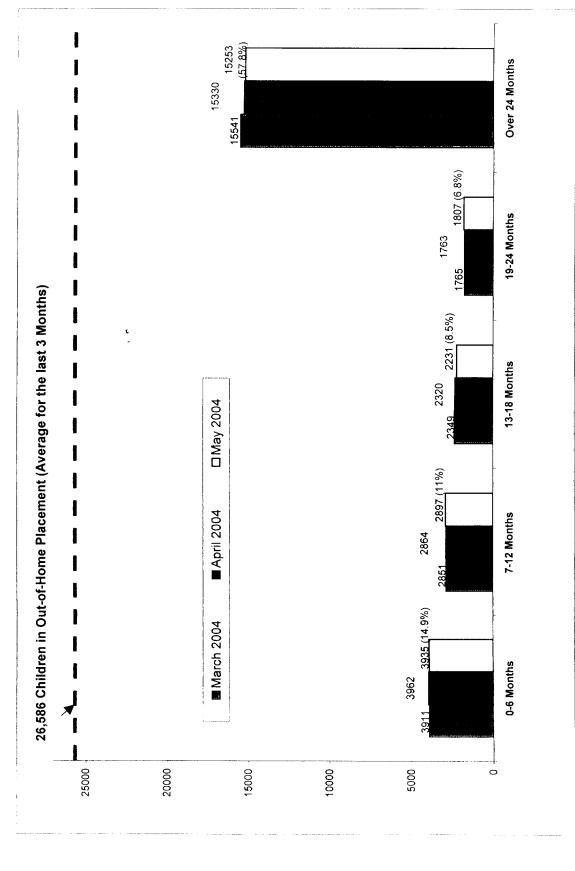
Permanency

6. Children in Out-of-Home Placement by Length of Stay for the Last 3 Months

Definition:

number of children in the length of stay criteria divided by the average number of months) in the last three report months. The percent is calculated based on the Placement (0-6 months, 7-12 months, 13-18 months, 19-24 months and over 24 This chart shows the average length of stay of Children in Out of Home children in out of home placement the last three report months.

Director's Goal #2: Reduce the median length of stay in placement by 10%.



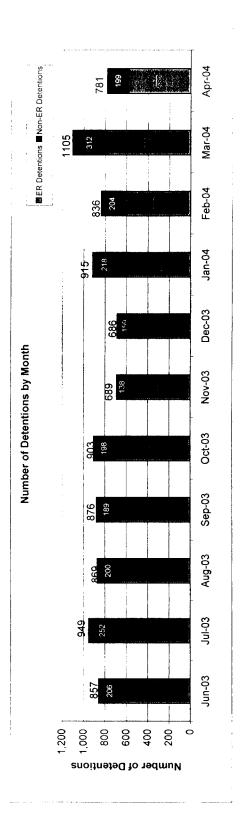
Detentions

7. Number of Detentions by Month

Definition:

The second chart shows the total number of referrals each month and the This report shows the chart on the number of detentions by month from workers (FM/R, PP and GN case workers) called Non-ER detentions. Response (ER) workers called ER detentions and by the Non-ER June 2003 to April 2004. Detentions are made by the Emergency percentage of detentions.

Director's Goal #1: Reduce the number of child detentions by 10%.



	-	Jun-03	Jul-03	Aug-03	Sep-03		Oct-03 Nov-03 Dec-03	Dec-03	Jan-04	Feb-04	Mar-04	Apr-04
Total ER Detentions		651	269	699			551	527	697	632	793	582
Total Non-ER Detention	ion	206	252	200	189	198	138	159	218	204	312	199
Total Detentions (ER+Non-ER)	lon-ER)	857	946	869	876	903	689	989	915	836	1,105	781
Total Children in OHP		30,048	29,595	29,456	29,345	29,234	28,941	28,686	28,499	27,902	27,806	27,703
16,000 17,000 10,000 8,000 6,000 2,000 2,000					Number of Referrals by Monnth	errals by Mc	Monnth		■ Total De ■ Total Na	■ Total Detentions (ER+Non-ER) ■ Total No. of Referrals		
Jun-03	3 Jul-03	3 Aug-03	03 Sep-03)3 Oct-03	3 Nov-03	03 Dec-03	-03 Jan-04	04 Feb-04		Mar-04 Ap	Apr-04	

	Jun-03	3al-03	¥	lg-03 Sep-03	Oct-03	Nov-03	Dec-03	Jan-04	Jan-04 Feb-04	Mar-04	Apr-04
Total Detentions (ER+Non-ER)	857	949	698	876	903	689	989	915	836	1,105	781
Total No. of Referrals	12398	11999	11072	12770	14155	10000	9787	111151	10903	13982	12269
Percent	6.91%	7.91%	7.85%	%98.9	6.38%	86.89	7.01%	8.21%	7.67%	7.90%	6.37%